

Alfred Mele
Self-Deception Unmasked

Chapter III

Self-Deception without Puzzles

§ **Sufficient Conditions for Entering Self-deception in Belief Acquisition**

1. **The belief that p which S acquires is false.**
2. **S treats data relevant, or at least seemingly relevant, to the truth value of p in a motivationally biased way.**
3. **This biased treatment is a non-deviant cause of S 's acquiring the belief that p .**
4. **The body of data possessed by S at the time provides greater warrant for $\sim p$ than for p .**

Q: Are these conditions *sufficient*? Are they *necessary*?

***** In comparison, Davidson's conditions for self-deception are as follows:

___ An agent A is self-deceived with respect to a proposition p under the following conditions:

1. A has evidence on the basis of which he believes that p is more apt to be true than its negation;
2. The thought that p , or the thought that he ought rationally to believe p , motivates A to act in such a way as to cause himself to believe the negation of p .
3. The action involved may be no more than an intentional directing of attention away from the evidence in favor of p ; or it may involve the active search for evidence against p .
4. All that self-deception demands of the action is that the motive originates in a belief that p is true (or recognition that the evidence makes it more likely to be true than not), and that the action be done with the intention of producing a belief in the negation of p .
5. The state that motivates self-deception and the state it produces coexist; in the strongest case, the belief that p not only causes a belief in the negation of p , but also sustains it.

Q: How are the two views different?

§ **Other factors at Work:**

***** selective evidence gathering process

___ Even though there is great evidence in favor of $\sim p$ readily available to the agents, owing to the selectivity of evidence gathering process, the evidence they actually possess at the time favor p over $\sim p$.

*** biased cognition**

___ A person's desire may play a role in producing the pertinent motivationally biased treatment of data.

§ Self-Deception in Belief Retention

Garden-variety self-deception is explicable independently of the assumption that self-deceivers manipulate data in an attempt to deceive themselves, or in an effort to protect or produce a favored belief. Nor is there an explanatory need to suppose that at some point Sam both believes that p and believes that $\sim p$.

*** Mele's claim:**

___ **There is no static puzzle (that the agent both believes that p and believes that $\sim p$).**

*** Mele on intention:**

1. An agent can intentionally do something, A , without intentionally bringing it about some result that A has.
2. Sam's aim may simply be to put off for a while the painful process of reflecting on evidence for a painful prospect.
3. There is no evidence that he is *trying* to protect himself by inducing an opposite belief in himself.

§ Two Strategies of Self-deception (in Dynamic Puzzle)

[Internal-biasing strategies]

___ **feature the manipulation of data that one already has.**

___ Positive and negative misinterpretation are strategies of this kind.

[Input-control strategies]

___ **feature one's controlling (to some degree) which data one acquires.**

___ Selective evidence-gathering is a prime example.

There are also *mixed* strategies, involving both internal biasing and input control.

§ Mele's Anti-intentionalist Account of self-deception:

1. The sophisticated behavior in garden-variety examples of self-deception may be accounted for on a less demanding hypothesis that does not require the agents to possess relevant intentions; for example, intentions to deceive themselves into believing that p , or to cause themselves to believe that p , or to make it easier for themselves to believe that p .
2. Motivational states can prompt and sustain biased cognition of the sorts common in self-deception without the assistance of such intentions.
3. The biased treatment of data is often a result of the various costs involved in falsely believing in p or falsely believing in $\sim p$.
4. The cost affects the agent's "confidence threshold" in accepting or rejecting a hypothesis.
5. Therefore, not all people will take all available relevant evidence at face value.
6. People with a lower threshold will demand less evidence than what is available, but this is not because they *intentionally* try to generate a particular belief in themselves.
7. Finally, a person's intelligence and intellectual training also are relevant.

Mele's conclusion:

___ Some theorists have made self-deception more theoretically perplexing than it actually is by imposing on the phenomena a problematic conception of self-deception.